

Mr. Ford's Page



THE ROOT problem, after all, is human nature. But to say that is to lay oneself open to the charge of platitude. There is an almost instinctive human dislike of any reminder that it is humanity, and not something outside of humanity, that is responsible for conditions. Even our wise men would rather talk learnedly about the effects of faulty human nature, as we view those effects in society, than about faulty human nature itself. However there is a very good object to be secured in compelling people to think deeply enough at times to penetrate as far as themselves, as far as their own secret natures, and as far as their individual responsibility for conditions.

We don't want to standardize human nature—we could not if we would. It is the endless variety of individuality that makes society endurable. But what all of us would like to do would be to standardize human moral dependability. We should like to be sure that to a certain essential degree we could absolutely depend on human nature "staying put." We are not sure of that now. We are not sure that we ever shall be sure of it.

We can depend on the ability of certain elements which affect human nature. Man's need of food, sleep, clothing and family life will influence him to a considerable degree; but even in spite of these he will still remain an unknown moral quantity.

When you form blocks of granite into the shape of a house, you are pretty sure that the granite is going to stay. But when you form men into an orderly society, you are not at all sure how long that form of society is going to stay. Unlike the material of the house, the material of society changes under your hands. There is no forecasting whether it will turn into adamant or sponge. It is now solid, now fluid, now hot, now cold, now orderly, now exulting in vast confusion.

Whatever may be the conditions in which we find ourselves at present, this is absolutely true of them; they were caused by people; they are being continued by people; they will change when people change, and not before. We cannot control the weather, nor every plague, but we can control—rather, we could control if we would—our social weather, with its storms, its uncertainty, its destructiveness and its unequal seasons.

ONE OF the strange phenomena of the present is the ascendancy of the destructive type of mind.

The world at large seems to be infatuated with the idea that if something is pulled down, something is thereby built up; if something is destroyed, something is thereby created.

There is in every country a party which believes that if it could destroy the orderly institutions of that country, it would thereby create a new era of social justice.

Every community has a group which believes that if only the channels of orderly justice and decency could be smashed, a new brotherhood of man would rise automatically out of the ruin.

Would-be philosophers preach the doctrine of the necessity of revolution; never was any progress made, they say, except through violent revolutions. But everybody knows that every revolution was a mistake and disgraced or postponed the liberties it sought. The most revolutionary thing in the world is an idea, and a conquering idea does not need to imprison, punish or kill a man to make itself powerful.

In the name of Order, disorder is counselled; in the name of Liberty, the dictatorship of a few idle and non-productive agitators is urged; in the name of Brotherhood, profound and venomous hatred between the classes is fomented. Surely, human nature is the sum of all contradictions!

What every thoughtful man should fear about a possible revolution is not its occurrence, but the course it would take after it was started.

The difficulty about revolutions is the impossibility of controlling them—an impossibility shared even by the men who start revolutions. They get out of hand. They rage like forest-fires. Very often they destroy even those who instigated them.

Revolutions are not orderly, social forces marching to the establishment of a new and better order. They are an outlet of hellish hatreds and unbridled passions, massive thefts, the death of moral and social responsibility, a most horrible debauch of all that is rottenest in human nature.

Humanity does not know of what stuff it is made until the restraint of society is taken off, and the mask is taken off, and human greeds and jealousies and ignorances and passions are given full sway.

The revolutions of which we may read comfortably in the books are not at all the revolutions the people went through. The real thing is the collapse of every element that justifies mankind considering itself as a high animal.

However, it is not alone to the disgruntled man that we must look for these destructionist influences. We are far too prone to talk as if the "Reds" were the only ones engaged in destroying social order and the solidity of social institutions.

Not at all. Any man, rich or poor, in business or in politics, who does anything that undermines men's faith in the essential justice at least of society's intentions, is thereby destroying society as rapidly, as menacingly, as criminally as any "Red" could do it.

What you find at one extreme of society, that you will find at the other. Rich criminals make poor criminals. Lawless millionaires make lawless miners. Lawless statesmen make lawless citizens. It works out inevitably this way.

IF YOU have profiteers in the big brownstone buildings, you will have hold-up men in the streets.

If you have a "to hell with the People" spirit in your higher offices, you are going to have a "to hell with the Government" spirit in the lower sections of your cities—and don't you forget it! What's sauce for the capitalistic gander is sauce for the laboristic goose.

It is not too much to say that the whole impetus of this present plague of lawlessness came from the top. Its whole reason for being comes from what we so wrongly call the "upper classes." These more favored classes were lawless first. And their lawlessness is coming back upon them with redoubled retribution, for the very fact that it is they who are now pleading for law and order is the reason why the plea is laughed at. Yes, law that the people may be kept in order, but no order so strict as that the privileged ones shall have to obey the law!—that is the mocking answer.

When they are trying the criminals of the Great War, they ought not to overlook the profiteers.

The profiteer is the most dangerous of all the "Reds" that have ever appeared on earth. He is more dangerous than kings—for we can get rid of kings. He is even more dangerous than militarists—militarists turn out to be very fallible men when their helmets and gold braid are removed. But the profiteer is always there, playing inside all the lines, making money out of soldiers' deaths and the distress of nations—the dirtiest money that ever found its way into a pocket!

The profiteer ought to be charged specifically with (a) defrauding the Government, (b) treason to the Army, (c) giving aid and comfort to the enemy, and (d) fomenting disloyalty in time of war.

It is pretty hard to gainsay the now common argument that a society which harbors the profiteer is itself in need of reform.

The profiteer is one of the excuses—one of the good excuses—which the "Reds" offer for their present attitude. And if the "Reds" would only center their attention there and help us get rid of the profiteers, that would be doing a regenerative and constructive act.

The crimes of the profiteer after the war, the increase of his already too big gains by speculating with the food of the people, certainly point him out as the one influence which more than any other has driven people into enmity toward our present form of society. This is where the destructive spirit was born.

Why would it not be a wise move to attack the destructive spirit at its source? Why not go after those men whose actions destroy the people's faith in the possibility of justice? They ought to be made to pay the penalty, and not society.

WHAT you find at one extreme of society, you will find at the other. If you have profiteers in the big brownstone buildings, you will have hold-up men in the streets. It is not only the "Reds" who are destroying society—it is also the men who destroy the people's confidence in the possibility of right intentions being followed out. What we need is not revolution in society, but regeneration in human nature. We are ready to lay the fault anywhere but where it belongs—on human nature. Humanity constitutes society; if you would mend society you must improve humanity.